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Pattern of conferences

Pattern of conferences

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report contains information on matters relating to conference management pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 66/233 and 66/246 of 24 December 2011 and other relevant mandates, as well as on initiatives undertaken by the Secretariat to improve the quality of conference services provided to Member States. Information is summarized to the extent possible in order to keep the report succinct and within the word limit. Statistical data are provided as supplementary information.[a]

[a] See http://dgacm.org/CoC/Report_of_the_SG_on_the_pattern_of_conferences_(A-67-127)_Supplementary_information.pdf.

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I. Meetings management

A. Calendar of conferences and meetings

1. Requests for exceptions to section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243 of 18 December 1985

1. Requests to meet during the main part of the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly have been received from the United Nations Board of Auditors, the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, the Independent Audit Advisory Committee, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the United Nations Disarmament Commission, the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination and the meeting of the States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (see supplementary information, sect. I). In accordance with established practice, the requests will be reviewed by the Committee on Conferences for recommendation to the General Assembly.

2. Calendar of conferences and meetings for 2013

2. During its substantive session, the Committee on Conferences will review the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2013 (A/AC.172/2012/L.2) and transmit its recommendations to the General Assembly. The calendar will be included as an annex to the report of the Committee to the Assembly.

3. Intersessional departures for 2012 and related matters

3. The Committee on Conferences approved a request received in 2012 from the Commission on the Status of Women to hold an additional meeting at the conclusion of its sessions. The Committee noted that the Fifth Committee required an additional meeting to complete its work at its first resumed session.

B. Utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

1. Analysis of meeting statistics of United Nations organs

4. The Electronic Meetings Planning and Resource Allocation system (gMeets) is being used to plan, schedule and record meetings at all four duty stations. It has also been successfully used for managing major United Nations conferences held away from headquarters, even if served by staff from various duty stations, which has facilitated the application of the proximity rule. Another development within gMeets has been the bilateral meetings module to schedule and record thousands of bilateral meetings that take place during the general debate of the General Assembly and high-level meetings at Headquarters in New York and at other locations.

5. Statistical data for the past three years on the utilization of conference resources allocated to a core sample of bodies that met in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi is contained in section II, table 1, of the supplementary information. The table also includes statistics on the percentage of pre-session

documentation issued four or six weeks before the beginning of the session or consideration of the item, depending on the time frame officially adopted by the bodies, and the availability index by week. In future the statistics relating to documents will be reported separately from the statistics relating to meetings.

6. The overall utilization factor for meetings for all four duty stations in 2011 remained at 85 per cent, as in 2010 (see supplementary information, sect. II, table 2). Section II of the supplementary information contains comparative statistical data for the past three years on the utilization factor (table 3) and meeting ratio (table 4). The utilization factor of the core sample of bodies in New York increased marginally to 82 per cent in 2011 from 81 per cent in 2010. The decrease of the utilization factor for meetings held at the United Nations Office at Vienna from 93 per cent in 2010 to 89 per cent in 2011 is due to an increase in time lost during meetings from 2010 to 2011, rather than cancellation of meetings. The number of meetings held in 2011, as in earlier years, exceeded the number of meetings planned owing to the extrabudgetary activities for which the United Nations Office at Vienna provides services. If funds become available, meetings are scheduled, sometimes at short notice.

7. Proactive planning of the biennial calendar at the time of preparing the semi-annual projections of meetings, and through periodic monitoring of any changes to the programmes of work, has led to an increase in the planning accuracy factor (see supplementary information, sect. II, table 5). The overall planning accuracy factor at the four duty stations remained at 88 per cent in 2011 (the same as in 2010), with New York recording an increase, to 83 per cent in 2011 from 82 per cent in 2010 (see supplementary information, sect. II, table 6). At the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the decrease in the planning accuracy factor from 96 per cent in 2010 to 93 per cent in 2011 stems from the fact that the secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) requested two additional meetings during the Governing Council sessions that were not planned.

8. Data on the number and percentage of all meetings programmed and held at the four duty stations (including the core sample) are shown in section II, table 7, of the supplementary information. The percentage of meetings programmed compared with meetings held for all meetings with interpretation in New York decreased from 97 per cent in 2010 to 95 per cent in 2011 (see supplementary information, sect. II, table 7). This decrease may be attributed to unutilized interpretation services that were programmed for meetings of Charter organs (such as the General Assembly and the Security Council) and some subsidiary bodies whose meetings do not follow a sessional pattern. Furthermore, it is proposed that the core sample be expanded to include additional bodies when their statistical data for three consecutive years are available; in Geneva, for example, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

9. In New York in 2011, three intergovernmental bodies had a utilization factor of less than the benchmark of 80 per cent for three consecutive years (see supplementary information, sect. II, table 1.A): the Committee on Contributions, the Commission for Social Development and the Statistical Commission. As requested by the General Assembly, the Chair of the Committee on Conferences will hold consultations with the bureaux and secretariats of those bodies and will report orally

thereon to the Committee at its substantive session. In Geneva one intergovernmental body had a utilization factor of less than 80 per cent for three consecutive years: the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Consultations with the substantive secretariats are held as necessary, and monitoring letters are sent on a regular basis to draw the attention of the organizing secretariats to the planned and actual utilization of conference resources. **It is proposed that starting this year, the Chair would write to the presiding officers of bodies based at duty stations other than New York if their utilization factor falls below the benchmark of 80 per cent.**

10. Starting in 2012, meetings services reports are being sent out to the secretariats of intergovernmental bodies, for the attention of the presiding officers, prior to the start of their scheduled sessions providing statistical data on the utilization factor for the past three years, including suggestions for improvement whenever necessary. Feedback received is valuable for future planning and monitoring.

11. Furthermore, in response to the request of the General Assembly contained in section II, paragraph 16, of its resolution 66/233, the Secretariat has identified the following intergovernmental bodies whose average utilization factor for the past 10 years has been below the benchmark of 80 per cent: the Committee on Contributions, the Committee on Information, the Commission for Social Development, the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization, the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and its Working Group, and the Statistical Commission. Details of the entitlements and utilization of conference resources of those bodies are contained in section II, table 8, of the supplementary information.

12. **It is recommended that the General Assembly urge the above-mentioned intergovernmental bodies to take into account their average utilization factor for the past 10 years when planning future sessions.**

13. The Secretariat has reviewed the process of preparing the biennial calendar of conferences and meetings, which incorporates the provisional biennial calendar of meetings in the economic, social and related fields. These two calendars are prepared and issued in odd-numbered years for the following biennium. The Committee on Conferences usually holds a meeting in June to review the provisional calendar. The comments of the Committee, if any, are then transmitted to the Economic and Social Council for its review and approval of the calendar of meetings in the economic, social and related fields in July during its substantive session. The Secretariat then consolidates into another document the overall biennial calendar for review by the Committee during its substantive session in September. As the latter contains almost two thirds of the meetings listed in the provisional biennial calendar, the review by the Committee on Conferences of the two biennial calendars so close to each other may be considered a duplication and redundant, as also the time and effort by the Secretariat to prepare, translate and issue two almost identical calendars within a short period of time.

14. It may be pointed out that the Economic and Social Council in its decision 281 (LXIII), paragraph (b), decided "to adopt, on a regular basis, a biennial cycle of meetings that would correspond to the programme budget cycle, for better administrative control". Also, in its decision 1988/103, the Council decided to invite the Committee on Conferences to review the provisional biennial calendar of

conferences and meetings of the Council, beginning with the calendar for 1990-1991, and submit, as appropriate, its recommendations thereon to the Council. Furthermore, since the Commission on Human Rights was replaced by the Human Rights Council on 15 March 2006 pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251, the number of subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council has been reduced to 32. Moreover, most of the approximately 190 calendar bodies listed in the calendar are either subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly or United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in the economic, social and related fields. The current process for the review and approval of the provisional biennial calendar by the Economic and Social Council may therefore need to be revisited.

15. **The General Assembly may wish to invite the Economic and Social Council to reconsider the necessity of reviewing its provisional biennial calendar of conferences and meetings in the economic, social and related fields.**

2. Provision of interpretation services to the meetings of bodies entitled to meet "as required"

16. A comparative analysis of the provision of interpretation services to meetings of bodies entitled to meet "as required" in New York shows an increase from 94 per cent in 2010 to 96 per cent in 2011. In Geneva, the 100 per cent provision of interpretation services in 2010 was maintained in 2011 (see supplementary information, sect. III, table 2).

3. Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States

17. The statistical data are broken down by regional and other major groupings at the four main duty stations for 2011 (see supplementary information, sect. IV). In New York, 92 per cent of the requests were met in 2011 (96 per cent in 2010). In Geneva, 89 per cent of the requests were met in 2011 (59 per cent in 2010). The United Nations Office at Vienna does not normally receive requests to provide interpretation to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, and accommodated 100 per cent of requests for meetings without interpretation services. At the United Nations Office at Nairobi, one request for the provision of interpretation services to regional and other major groupings of Member States was met in 2011.

4. Utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi

18. In 2011, all meetings of Nairobi-based bodies were held in Nairobi, in conformity with the headquarters rule. In addition, the twelfth special session of the Governing Council of UNEP was exceptionally held in Nairobi as it coincided with the fortieth anniversary of UNEP.

5. Utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa

19. In 2011, the United Nations conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) hosted and serviced 4,767 meetings, which represents a utilization rate of 70 per cent, the same rate as in 2010. The zero growth can be attributed to the net effect of the aggressive marketing campaign and the increase in less restrictive alternative options, which include the growing number of hotels and

government conference halls for organizations that are not part of the United Nations system and corporations to host conferences and meetings in Addis Ababa.

20. The recent inauguration of the conference complex of the African Union in 2012 has added yet another dimension to the already fierce competition and is likely to have an adverse impact on the utilization of the United Nations conference centre. To this extent, it is worth noting that the major meeting of the African Union, namely the African Union Heads of States Summit, was hosted in the newly built African Union conference complex in 2012.

21. With this new dimension in competition for holding conferences, ECA has embarked on a wide publicity campaign through aggressive advertising in key newspapers and on major radio stations in Africa and outside the continent (e.g., *Jeune Afrique* and South African Broadcasting Corporation radio), as well as relevant exhibitions and congresses (International Congress and Convention Association Congress and IMEX exhibition), for greater visibility and outreach. In addition, the Commission is collaborating with key players in Ethiopia and abroad in intensified public relations and a promotional strategy for the period 2012-2013 aimed at substantially increasing the utilization rate of the United Nations conference centre.

C. Impact on meetings held at Headquarters of the implementation of the capital master plan

22. The Department continues to face challenges in servicing and accommodating the many ad hoc requests in excess of the core activities of calendar bodies. Constant interaction and cooperation with the requesting offices minimizes any disruptions to the intergovernmental process. The availability of rooms is expected to improve in the next phase of the capital master plan with the restoration of the Trusteeship Council Chamber and two conference rooms in the Conference Building.

23. Renovations of the Conference Building are on schedule. Migration of the conference rooms in the North Lawn Building will begin in December 2012, with the inauguration of the Conference Building scheduled for the end of January 2013. Once the Conference Building has been inaugurated, work will begin to convert the Economic and Social Council Chamber and Room 2 in the North Lawn Building into the temporary General Assembly Hall, which will allow only four seats, instead of six, for each delegation. Seating for VIPs and guests will also be reduced during this period. An updated chart showing the availability of conference rooms during the remaining phases of the capital master plan is contained in section V of the supplementary information.

II. Integrated global management

A. Status report

24. Pursuant to the request to the Secretary-General contained in resolution 66/233 (sect. III, para. 15) to continue to assess the conference management efficiency and accountability mechanisms across the four main duty stations, the heads of the

Department and of the offices responsible for conference management in the Secretariat — the Directors-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, the United Nations Office at Vienna and the United Nations Office at Nairobi and the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management at Headquarters — held a videoconference to follow up on the progress made in that regard. At an earlier meeting, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, with the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management and, via videoconference, the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi and representatives of the Directors-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva and the United Nations Office at Vienna, the participants had agreed that the Secretariat senior officials responsible for conference management should engage in face-to-face consultations on the process for harmonizing the relevant Secretary-General's bulletins.

25. The videoconference of the senior officials responsible for conference management provided an opportunity for direct and focused consideration of matters of overall policy and global management of conference services. They agreed that the responsibility and accountability of the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management and the Directors-General at the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi for conference services and operations were clearly stipulated in the respective Secretary-General's bulletins, were fully in line with the General Assembly mandate delineated in resolution 57/283 B (sect. II.B, para. 7), and should be carried out with due consideration of the specificities of the various duty stations and their functioning in the field of conference services (sect. II.B, para. 8).

26. The responsibility of the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management for implementing conference services policy (resolution 57/283 B, sect. B, para. 7) remains unfulfilled in the delineation of responsibility and accountability given in the relevant Secretary-General's bulletins, although it is being practised for the most part. Proposals presented during the videoconference by the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva on behalf of the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, and by the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, were aimed at reaching an understanding from a practical point of view by enhancing sharing of responsibility among the duty stations and improving the reporting lines to Headquarters on the implementation of the provisions of relevant resolutions and policies related to conference management.

27. There would be a need to amend the relevant Secretary-General's bulletins so as to ensure the fullest harmony among the four main duty stations, and throughout the Secretariat, including with regard to the placement of conference management units in the organizational structures of the various duty stations. In addition, the issuance of Secretary-General's bulletins setting out organizational structures will overlap with the organization of several other departments and offices that provide services and which have responsibility and reporting lines that cross organizational boundaries similar to conference management, such as safety and security and information and communications technology.

28. In 2011, the Department continued to apply the proximity rule to meetings held away from the four duty stations. For every such meeting, the specific requirements for conference services were shared with conference managers at the

four duty stations and the regional commissions where applicable. The proximity rule, however, is not applied mechanically; comparison of the cost of airfares is just one of the criteria for the selection of conference servicing staff. While all options and cost estimates are carefully compared, assurance of quality remains the primary criterion, with due consideration of replacement costs and availability of capacity to provide services both at the conference and for the regular schedule of meetings at the duty stations. During the biennium 2010-2011, the savings realized through the implementation of the proximity rule are estimated at $1.1 million ($0.65 million in 2010 and $0.45 million in 2011).

B. Performance measurement

29. The global e-survey created in 2009 is harmonized and synchronized across the four duty stations with common indicators of the satisfaction of Member States. The global e-survey was promoted and distributed to Member and observer States at the four duty stations by means of an e-mail message from the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management with a link to the survey, announcements and links in the Journal of the United Nations and on all relevant websites and through promotional activities at each duty station. Besides indicating the ratings of services currently provided, the global e-survey also seeks to elicit feedback on improving the quality of the services. Written comments and complaints are collected and distributed to each responsible office, and lessons learned are drawn for the effectiveness of future surveys. In 2011, the global e-survey was launched in May and November 2011, and was made available for a period of four weeks and five weeks respectively (see supplementary information, sect. VI).

C. Evaluation by Member States of the quality of conference services

30. The response rate for the e-survey remained disproportionately low among all regional and other major groups. A total of 74 responses were received at all the duty stations for the May 2011 e-survey, of which 41 per cent rated the services provided by the Department as "excellent" and 6 per cent as "poor". A total of 46 responses were received at all the duty stations for the November 2011 e-survey, of which 39 per cent rated the services provided by the Department as "excellent" and 4 per cent as "poor". Poor ratings were mainly attributed to difficulties experienced in finding information on the electronic board, the unavailability of documents in all official languages simultaneously, and the services provided by the meeting servicing staff.

31. In 2011, the Department in New York held two rounds of language-specific informational meetings with Member States on the quality of language services in 2011, in April and September; the Division of Conference Management in Geneva conducted one round of informational meetings in May; the Conference Management Service in Vienna conducted two informational meetings, one in April and one in December; and the Division of Conference Services in Nairobi held three informational meetings, one in February and two in October. In addition to the regular e-survey on conference services, the Department maintains a database to capture ad hoc feedback on the quality of its services.

32. The first round of informational meetings for 2012 in New York was held in April with the second round to follow during the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly. The meetings in New York were marked by low attendance by Member States. Participation of Member States in the meetings held at the United Nations Office at Geneva (15 in May 2011 and 7 in May 2012) was also very low. The consistently low level of attendance at such meetings suggests that the time may have come to revisit their timing and periodicity. Continuing interaction with and feedback from Member States would appear to be a more effective and meaningful way of responding in a timely manner to the language-related and other concerns of Member States. **The General Assembly may wish to scale back to one meeting the mandate requiring the Department to hold two annual informational meetings, while urging Member States to engage the Secretariat in a continuing dialogue on language services, including matters of terminology and usage and other issues of concern to them.**

33. Documentation — and specifically the consolidation of documentation — remained a key issue of concern to the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, which, pursuant to resolution 65/315 (para. 17), heard a briefing on documentation matters in April 2012. The briefing focused principally upon three points related to the tangible results achieved by the Working Group in this area by virtue of its previous resolutions, including the question of accessibility of United Nations documents. Member States were also informed that, as of May 2011, communications were being sent electronically to Member States with a confirmation of receipt requested. Where that confirmation was not received, the Secretariat telephoned the Mission to be sure that the document had been received.

III. Matters related to documentation and publications

A. Documents management

34. During the reporting cycle, further progress was achieved in the area of proactive document management. In 2011, the overall timely submission rate on document count was 88 per cent at United Nations Headquarters (896 out of 1,020), 74 per cent at the United Office at Geneva (1,398 out of 1,892), 43 per cent at the United Nations Office at Vienna (49 out of 114) and zero per cent at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (0 out of 49). In terms of the number of author departments and offices meeting the 90 per cent timely submission benchmark, United Nations Headquarters reached 76 per cent in 2011 (37 of 49). The rate was 45 per cent (5/11) at Geneva, and zero per cent at both Vienna (0/3) and Nairobi (0/2). Discussions continue among the duty stations with a view to taking more effective action towards meeting the achievable target of 90 per cent for overall compliance.

35. As requested by the Member States, the Department continues to pay close attention and give high priority to the documents of the Fifth Committee. In 2012, there were 10 pre-session documents of the Fifth Committee at the first resumed session of the General Assembly, of which eight were slotted and two were unexpected submissions. Four documents were issued less than two weeks before the meeting, which included two documents over the word limit. The other two

documents took an average of only 12 calendar days to be processed by the Department, much less than the standard four weeks.

36. At the second resumed session there were 55 documents for the Fifth Committee, of which 32, or 58 per cent, were issued at least six weeks before the meeting. Eight documents were issued less than two weeks before the meeting, of which four were over the word limits and took a longer time to process. One had to be redrafted after submission to the Department following a change in the mandate by the Security Council. For the rest, the average processing time in the Department was less than two weeks. Five documents were unslotted but processed as rush jobs.

37. New York continued to maintain 100 per cent timely processing of documents submitted on time and within word limits, and in many instances using less than four weeks so as to absorb part of the impact of late submissions. As a result, 73 per cent of all pre-session documents issued in New York met the mandated timely issuance benchmarks. The United Nations Office at Geneva reported timely processing of 26 per cent and 11 per cent respectively for Secretariat and non-Secretariat reports, and the United Nations Office at Vienna reported 37 per cent and 50 per cent respectively. At Geneva, inadequate capacity and unavailability of qualified translators in some language combinations were the primary causes for the low rate of timely issuance of documentation. In addition, owing to the nature of bodies serviced in Geneva, many documents were unplanned or submitted late, and often required priority treatment over documents submitted on time.

38. Waiver management is a critical component of proactive document management. The Department consults with the author departments and offices for documents originating in the Secretariat when their length exceeds the established word limits, with a view to reaching a mutually agreed document length that will not adversely affect either the quality of the presentation or the content of the reports. In 2011, the number of waivers was 26 at United Nations Headquarters, 23 at the United Nations Office at Geneva and 5 at the United Nations Office at Vienna. By contrast, in 2010 the number of waivers was 41, 35 and 8 respectively.

39. A common document management system (gDoc) is currently being developed to allow for the implementation of the global documentation planning and processing system in New York and Geneva. The project entails extensive analysis of business process and requirements, and is envisaged to lead to standard harmonized business process and requirements that take into account respective local differences. Comprehensive testing, training and refinement, including a post-implementation stage, are slated for 2013.

40. For the biennium 2010-2011, the workload sharing rates were: New York Headquarters 1 per cent, United Nations Office at Geneva 0.6 per cent, United Nations Office at Vienna 0.8 per cent and United Nations Office at Nairobi 0.42 per cent. As stated in the 2011 report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences, workload sharing does not represent a significant proportion of overall workload because there is little surplus capacity, given that all four duty stations forecast substantial capacity shortfalls throughout the year compared with expected work inflow, leaving no room to shift workload. Nevertheless, workload sharing is initiated when the need arises, in order to make efficient use of resources and ensure timely availability of documents.

41. The Secretariat has published a number of lists of individuals and entities subject to Security Council sanctions in the six official languages of the United Nations, for example in connection with the Sudan, Somalia/Eritrea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The consolidated lists for the Security Council committees in connection with Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Libya, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006), the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1737 (2006) and the newly established Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2048 (2012) concerning Guinea-Bissau are expected to follow suit in the near future.

42. Furthermore, the relevant committees have decided to make publicly accessible on their websites, in the six official languages, narrative summaries of the reasons for the listing of all individuals and entities on the Al-Qaida Sanctions List and the 1988 (2011) Sanctions List. In total, 324 summaries have been posted for the Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee and 131 for the 1988 (2011) Sanctions Committee, amounting to over 2,700 pages made available in the six official languages. Since the previous substantive session of the Committee on Conferences, there has been a net decrease in the number of individuals and entities on the above two lists. The lists remain active and names are continuously being added and removed.

B. Digitization of important older United Nations documents

43. The task of digitizing, processing and uploading to the United Nations website all important older United Nations documents, that is, parliamentary records of the Organization going back to 1946, is a continuing programme of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library in collaboration with the Library of the United Nations Office at Geneva.

44. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library has completed the digitization of the General Assembly Official Records supplements of the first to forty-seventh sessions in English, French and Spanish, thus ensuring online access to the entire series. The Library at Geneva is completing the digitization of the same document series in Arabic, Chinese and Russian. In addition, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library has commenced digitization of General Assembly plenary meeting records in English, French and Spanish. The Library at Geneva is digitizing additional official documents of the Conference on Disarmament, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Human Rights in all available official languages. All digitized parliamentary documents, including Security Council documents from 1946 to 1993, in all six official languages, are accessible online on the Official Document System (ODS) of the United Nations.

45. The digitization of parliamentary documents is a labour-intensive process, and the amount of documentation issued prior to the creation of ODS is huge. As at May 2012, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library had uploaded to ODS 233,933 important older documents of approximately 2,313,710 pages and the Library at Geneva has digitized 82,515 documents of 1,158,546 pages. There remain an estimated 3,743,000 important older documents to be digitized amounting to over 59.6 million pages. Through the utilization of faster, state-of-the-art scanning equipment and

outsourcing to alleviate the shortage of staffing, it is anticipated that the digitization of all remaining important documents issued prior to the creation of ODS could be completed in the course of five years. However, outsourcing digitization would entail a major project, for which funding would need to be sought.

C. Printing and distribution operations

46. Several trends that have been observed during the previous two bienniums are expected to persist, and to largely shape the make-up and direction of printing and distribution operations at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The volume of production and distribution of parliamentary documents in the Secretariat is expected to maintain its downward trend, but will likely stabilize at a certain level that meets the requirements of Member States. This trend may be attributed to the recognition by Member States of the imperative of environmental sustainability, the ability of the Department to provide alternative electronic outputs economically to replace paper printouts, and the successful trials of evolving sustainable paper-smart modes for provision of conference services.

47. Another positive trend is the increased proportion of digitally printed parliamentary documents vis-à-vis offset printing. The overall proportion of documents printed digitally for 2011 was nearly two thirds of the overall production. Among other things, compliance with page limits for parliamentary documents and submission dates by author departments and offices, and the stability of meetings schedules, are bound to facilitate increasing the proportion of digitally printed documents, thereby leveraging the economic benefits of the investment made and reducing the unit cost of production.

48. At the United Nations Office at Geneva, 100 per cent of parliamentary documents are printed digitally. In line with the directives of the Secretary-General to enhance environmental sustainability, the Publishing Service at Geneva has achieved a 100 per cent paperless workflow for the production of parliamentary documents. In addition, in November 2010 the Publishing Service at Geneva was awarded an independently audited ISO 14001 certification of their printing and distribution processes. Fully digital electronic documentation processing and distribution, as well as digital printing, is the practice also in Vienna. The ISO 14001 certification was achieved by the United Nations Office at Vienna in 2011 jointly with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

49. In carrying out the directives of the Secretary-General to enhance environmental sustainability and move towards climate neutrality, the Department seeks to provide integrated, sustainable, paper-smart meeting services in an economically efficient and environmentally friendly manner. The General Assembly, in its resolution 66/233 (sect. IV, paras. 23 and 24), noted the concept of paper-smart meetings and requested the Secretary-General to define the concept, report on lessons learned from the implementation of the concept on a trial basis and identify the requirements for providing such services. In this context, the definition of paper-smart services will entail setting out the nature, scope and modalities for the provision of such services to various intergovernmental bodies. This effort, together with similar, previous and ongoing efforts at the duty stations, promises to become an impetus for change in the Secretariat.

50. The theme of the videoconference at the 2012 substantive session of the Committee on Conferences will address paper-smart meetings and the lessons learned from the application of paper-smart services to conferences and meetings on a trial basis, in particular the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

IV. Matters related to translation and interpretation

51. It is the expectation of the Department that its ability to attract and retain the services of freelance language professionals will very likely be enhanced with the coming into force on 1 July 2012 of a new agreement between the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) regulating the conditions of employment of short-term conference interpreters, and the new agreement between CEB and the International Association of Conference Translators (AITC), which regulates the conditions of employment of short-term conference translators and which is expected to come into force on 1 January 2013. Both agreements, the negotiation of which was initiated by the Department in response to a recommendation by the Office of Internal Oversight Services endorsed by the General Assembly, align the conditions of employment offered to freelance language staff to those of permanent staff, reduce competition among the employing organizations, and simplify the management of freelance contracts while addressing the concern expressed by Member States about the imbalance among duty stations in the availability of staff with the relevant language combinations.

52. The pursuit by the Department of high-quality translation and interpretation services is based on a three-pronged approach: (a) reliance on exacting standards in recruiting language staff only through periodic competitive language examinations in the relevant language professions; (b) provision of training and close and continuing supervision of junior language staff throughout their initial probationary period and beyond, as well as expanded opportunities for upgrading substantive and technical skills for longer-serving staff; and (c) an outreach programme aimed at helping equip graduates of partner language training institutions with the skill sets required by language services, with a view to expanding the pool of potential recruits.

53. In order to replenish depleted language rosters, the Department submits to the Office of Human Resources Management requests for holding about 21 language competitive examinations each year. The limited resources of the Examinations and Tests Section, however, give it a standing capacity to conduct only eight to nine such examinations each year. With support from the Department, 15 of the most urgently needed examinations will be conducted in 2012.

54. The Department has long had in place a rigorous system for ensuring that translations produced by its translation services meet the high standards of quality and timeliness expected by Member States. Thus, as a matter of policy, all parliamentary documents submitted for translation are subjected to such critical processes as editorial control, as an initial step in order to ensure compliance with United Nations editorial guidelines, referencing in order to identify relevant sources and information, and, upon completion of the translation, revision by revisers with expertise and experience in the relevant subject matter.

55. The Department is continually seeking to increase the share of its workload done by external contractors, subject to enhanced quality assurance mechanisms, including by reviewing the categories of documents sent for external processing, placing work that is not part of the usual parliamentary workload, and administering ad hoc tests aimed at enlarging the pool of qualified individual contractors. The Department has also increased its reliance on off-site translation and précis-writing arrangements in lieu of non-local recruitment as a further cost-saving measure.

56. With the upgrading of reviser posts to the senior reviser P-5 level at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the quality control function is now being performed at all duty stations by staff at the appropriate level.

57. Quality control is now coordinated in the translation services by designated focal points at the senior reviser level, who interact regularly with and provide feedback to both individual and corporate contractors. While the learning curve of institutional contractors is generally rather steep, experience has shown that continuing interaction with them tends to improve performance over time, even though the process is time-consuming and the benefits not readily apparent.

58. A novel approach to quality control that consists of retaining non-self-revising contractors and fully revising their translations for purposes of quality control has been successfully tested in various units. This approach serves both to enlarge the pool of contractors and to nurture potential candidates for recruitment through the regular competitive language examination system.

59. Quality control as a function may be viewed in the broader context of quality management. The extent and efficiency of quality control is largely dependent on the quality of the translation received from external contractors, who must be fully engaged in order to enhance their knowledge and skills in handling the relevant subjects. Regular and continuous communication is needed between contractors and the translation services, including through periodic on-site contracts. Because issues of terminology, format, consistency, revision, deadlines and other aspects of language work must be discussed and resolved, quality management can easily occupy up to half of the time of a senior reviser, who, in addition, is responsible for a host of other functions, including roster management, upstream quality management and supervision of trainees.

60. Continuous staff training is one of the pillars of succession planning in the Department. Language staff benefit from in-house training offered free of charge by the Office of Human Resources Management. Subject to the availability of resources, they also benefit from external studies subsidized through the programme for the upgrading of substantive and technical skills. In the period 2011-2012, the main focus of the programme was on skill gaps identified by the staff members themselves in consultation with their supervisors during their performance review. Special attention is also given to language combinations for which the Department is experiencing difficulties in filling current vacancies, as well as to the fast-evolving field of translation technology (see supplementary information, sect. VII, table 5).

61. The Department continued and enhanced its collaboration with academic institutions within the framework of its outreach to universities programme. The number of universities that have signed memorandums of understanding increased from 19 to 21, with the addition of a university in Latin America (National

University of Cordoba, Argentina) and a university in Africa (University of Ain Shams, Egypt). The second conference of universities that have signed a memorandum of understanding with the Department was hosted by the University of Mons (Belgium) in May 2012 and allowed both sides to continue to refine their common strategies in the field of training language professionals. The second Pan-African Conference on the Training of Translators, Conference Interpreters and Public Service Interpreters was held in Addis Ababa, also in May 2012. Participants examined the draft administrative structure and budget of the African Universities Consortium, which will be in charge of implementing a programme of assistance to universities in sub-Saharan Africa in the field of training of translators and interpreters.

62. The language internship programme was enlarged by adding an additional session. In 2011, this session hosted 37 interns (New York Headquarters 18, United Nations Office at Geneva 8, United Nations Office at Vienna 3 and United Nations Office at Nairobi 8). Language staff from the Department made about 40 visits to universities that have signed a memorandum of understanding in 2011 on their own time, mostly in conjunction with their home leave, to meet with faculty and provide training to students, and devoted a total of 97 person-days of pedagogical assistance to universities in 2011. A preliminary impact assessment has shown that at least 11 candidates have passed a language competitive examination since 2007 after benefiting from a language internship or traineeship, and about 27 former interns and trainees are on the roster as freelancers after passing the freelance test.

63. Implementation of the pilot project undertaken by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and its Legal Subcommittee at the United Nations Office at Vienna to use digital recordings of meetings in the six official languages of the Organization has proven successful both as a digital alternative to written meeting records and as a cost-saving measure. Data show an increasing use of the system by the secretariat and delegates, and feedback is collected on a continuous basis. The system, which is being run on a trial basis through 2015, integrates an advanced digital recording system with meetings management tools and archiving within the gMeets platform. During meetings all interpretation channels and the floor channel are recorded digitally and are promptly available on the website of the Office for Outer Space Affairs, together with an electronic log showing the list of speakers. It is also possible for the Secretariat to upload additional material to enrich the meeting archives and assist in searching of the audio files.

64. At its session which ended on 6 July 2012, the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law also approved the testing of digital recordings for the period 2012-2014, while maintaining summary records. At the same time, the Department, through the International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications is reviewing good practices in this area developed by other intergovernmental organizations to help in charting the way forward.